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ABSTRACT

This seventh and concluding volume in a series containing the proceedings of the 1983 Australian Family Research Conference contains a panel discussion on policy making as well as the conference's closing address. Panel discussion members were Austin Asche, Peter Bailey, Jonathon Bradshaw, Marie Coleman, Lionel Murphy, David Scott, Pat Troy, and Malcolm Wicks. The discussion highlights the difficulties faced by both policy makers and those who provide them with information. The path from a family policy decision to the actual enactment of the policy is a very difficult one. In the closing address of the conference Don Edgar stresses the need for researchers to search for causes underlying changes in family structure by looking beyond the family itself at the underlying constructs that explain the changes. He suggests that perhaps social conditions now require a new family form. The volume concludes with a list of speakers and a subject index to the entire seven volumes. (RM)

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AUSTRALIAN FAMILY RESEARCH CONFERENCE

Held at Burgmann College, Australian National University, Canberra, 23-25 November 1983

PROCEEDINGS

VOLUME VII

Panel Discussion, Closing Address and Index

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Volume III: Marital adjustment and breakdown
Volume IV: Policies and families
Volume V: Support Networks
Volume VI: Family life
Volume VII: Closing address and index

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POLICY-MAKING: JUST PRAGMATISM?

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POLICY MAKING: JUST PRAGMATISM?

Don Edgar: Ladies and gentlemen, can we make a start. Let me welcome you again because I think there are some people here this evening who have not been at the conference during the day. Today's conference got off to an excellent start and although we are all suffering somewhat from information overload, we all know where we need to go in discussion tomorrow and on Friday.

I would like to introduce to you the presiding member of the Board of Management of the Institute of Family Studies, Mr Justice Aschem, who will introduce the panel members to you. Mr Justice Asche.

Austin Asche: Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure as presiding member of the Board of Management of the Institute of Family Studies, to welcome you here tonight and to welcome these distinguished guests. The somewhat enigmatic title of the discussion, 'Policy Making - Just Pragmatism? highlights the difficulties faced by both policy makers and those who provide them with information. The path from a policy decision to the actual enactment of the policy - to the putting of policy into hard, concrete terms - is a very difficult and often mysterious one. If you put a policy into action too soon you will get into difficulties and if you do it too late you also get into difficulties. If you do it too soon you will be in trouble because you will probably find yourself criticised for being in advance of your time and if you do it too late you will probably be like Louis XVI frantically putting forward your policy too late and getting your head chopped off. Indeed, I suppose it is another way of the sort of 'why don't they' conversation that you hear in every pub or club that you may visit. 'Why don't they do this, why don't they do that.

I would like to thank each of the members of the panel for agreeing to participate conight and introduce you to them, although in most cases their eminence is such that you will know of them.

First of all Mr Justice Lionel Murphy, as you all know, is a Judge of the High Court of Australia, and was a Senator for New South Wales from 1962 to 1975, leader of the government in the Senate, and

Attorney-General and Minister for Customs and Excise in the Labor Government from 1972 to 1975. His Honour's key role in the introduction of the Family Law Act is well known to us all and indeed I was going to describe His Honour as father of the Family Law Act, but recognising that we mustn't be sexist these days, might I describe him as the parent of the Family Law Act.

Mrs Marie Coleman has been Specialist Advisor with the Social Welfare Policy Secretariat since 1982. She was Director of the Office of Child Care from 1976 to 1982 and chairperson of the National Social Welfare Commission from 1974 to 1976. She has been involved with the Institute in several areas and brings to the panel a wide range of experience as a senior bureaucrat in policy sensitive areas.

Mr Peter Bailey has been Deputy Chairman of the Human Rights Commission since 1981 and before that held a number of senior positions in Government departments including the Treasury, Prime Minister's Department and the Cabinet Office. Along with other advisory roles to Government he was a member of the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration.

Dr Peggy Koopman-Boyden has joined us from across the Tasman for this conference. She is senior lecturer in sociology at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch and a member of the New Zealand Planning Council which is that country's foremost independent policy body advising Government. She is also co-author of a book entitled Government Policy and the Family in New Zealand and is presenting a paper tomorrow titled 'Dependency: A Challenge for Family Policy'.

Professor Jonathan Bradshaw comes from even further afield. He is Director of the Social Policy Research Unit at York University in the United Kingdom. The Social Policy Research Unit is financed by Department of Health and Social Security to look at family policy.

Mr Malcolm Wicks we also welcome from the United Kingdom where he has been Research Director for the Study Commission on the Family. He is now in the process of setting up, as Director, a permanent successor to that body to be known as the Family Policy Study Centre. One of his reasons for visiting Australia is to look at our Institute of Family Studies and we look forward to some interchange of ideas.

Mr David Scott is well known for his work with the Brotherhood of St Laurence from 1952 to 1982. He has recently been chairman of the Victorian Government's Child Development and Family Services Council. He sits on the Committee of Inquiry of the Victoria Police and has a function which is cryptically known as Principal Advisor to the Minister. He is, of course, also publisher of the magazine Australian Society and I have the great pleasure of sitting with David on the Council of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology which is one of the great colleges in Australia, and before Dr Connolly gets too red in the face, may I also say that the Institute of Early Childhood Development is also a very fine college.

Mr Pat Troy is last on the list but he is certainly not least in our regard. He is a Senior Fellow in the Urban Research Unit and co-ordinator of the Social Justice Project at the Australian National University. In a wide ranging career he has been, amongst other things, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Urban and Regional Development, Deputy Chairman of the Australian Housing Corporation, a member of the South Australian Land Commission and a member of the Western Australian Urban Land Council.

I would like to thank very much all panel members for agreeing to be with us in this discussion and we look forward with great interest to hearing what these very experienced people have to say to us.

Don Edgar: Thank you very much Judge. I would like to introduce the topic and then call on the members of the panel to make a quick foray into the areas they see as most important. We will then open up the discussion more widely to those of you in the audience. We hope that members of the panel will also comment upon one another's statements. Over the three and a half year's life of the Institute, that is if you date it from the appointment of the Director, the most important and difficult issue with which we have grappled is the way in which policy as expressed in Government legislation and programmes can be informed and, dare I say, influenced by our research. When I took the job as Director I did so on the understanding that the last thing Australia needed was another organisation which would conduct narrowly theoretical research and publish its findings only in academic journals read by few and capable of influencing no-one. However, as many others

with similar resolve have discovered, there has been an exceptation/ reality gap of quite significant proportions.

This is not to say that we have failed in our effort, in fact we have only just started. This conference is our first attempt to produce to the public and to Governments some of our findings for use in the policy-making process. Rather, it is simply to attest that the process of influencing policy is painstaking, labour intensive, fraught with danger and operates very much by accretion.

In a recently published Australian National University Press monograph, entitled Youth, Transition and Social Research, Dr Ken McKinnon, the former Director of the Schools Commission, has addressed this issue from an educational policy-maker's perspective. He notes several reasons for the lack of impact of research on policy. These include the usual observation that among the research community there seems to be general acceptance of the idea that the most important and useful research is theory based - unfortunately that often means armchair theorising rather than anything that looks at the real world out there in Australian society.

Second, he notes the problem of defining questions of importance in mutually comprehensible ways to researchers and policy-makers. We might understand what questions we are asking but the policy-makers often don't. That can often be a question of both conceptual and linguistic incomprehensibility. One of the things that the Institute has tried and I think succeeded in doing is publishing in a readable, practical, down to earth, non-jargon ridden way.

Third, he notes the need for timeliness in research information. In other words, getting your data in at the point where it may be of some use.

Fourth, he notes the importance of the difference between policy oriented research and the process of policy formation. They are not the same things.

In relation to that last point, Ken McKinnon observes that policy formulation is a task for those in Government with that sort of training and experience. Policy formulation involves a great element of judgement about the benefits and costs of moving in particular ways and the political consequences of so doing. Policy research is one step back from this. It analyses, it marshalls facts and evidence, it defines feasible courses of action, it sets out options.

In writing to our panel members, we listed a number of impediments from the policy-makers' point of view which had been suggested to us as inhibiting the use of research. These we summarised as: policy-makers receive too much information and they receive information in inappropriate forms; they do not understand the issues with which we require them to deal (often policy-makers are unaware of real issues in society); they do not have time to consider a range of options anyway; or, policy-makers are out of touch with changing social attitudes. Further, information is considered in restricted forms or restricted forums, for example, in Cabinet submissions, at Ministerial briefings, in Cabinet committees, or dare I say it, only in Canberra; party or electoral considerations are of course of overriding importance, so these often act as an impediment, even where the research is understood and really believed as worthy of implementation in some form of practice.

In that context, policy decisions generally appear to be geared towards shorter term objectives, based on assessment of popular appeal and political acceptability. Lord Keynes wrote at the end of his <u>General Theory</u> this:

'Practical men who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Mad men in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back.'

In my experience the opposite is more often true in our times. Academic scribblers are the slaves to politicians; they seek to bring elegance and rationalisation and sometimes a modicum of respectability to directions already chosen by practical men confronted by hard and immediate problems. Decisions rarely flow from the ideas of intellectuals, or from memoranda. And interest groups are far too pragmatic to be the puppets of intellectuals.

This, then, leads us to ask the question; to what extent can longer term considerations and proposals based on more thorough-going analysis ever intrude in the determination of policy outcomes? And secondly, is it inevitable that policy-making is just a matter of pragmatism?

Martin Rein and Sheldon White, in a recent article, speak of the gap between the expert's 'cold knowledge' and its lack of fit with the 'hot knowledge' of the practitioner, administrator or planner. Most theories are found wanting in the heat of practice, yet theories still act as a king of 'mythic webbing' that holds back the guilt of inefficacy and offers some crucial emotional and ethical pathways - a sort of rationalisation and cognitive map for what one does in everyday practice.

So I hope, as panel members, you do not feel too much the delicate anguish of the expert, described by Voltaire, my favourite Voltaire, 'the necessity of saying something, the embarrassment produced by the consciousness of having nothing to say and the desire to exhibit the ability, are three things sufficient to render even a great man ridiculous'.

With those words I would like to invite members of the panel to give us some brief comment on their approach to policy-making and research and then we will lead into some further discussion.

Is anyone game to go first or should we start from the end and work our way down. Professor Jonathan Bradshaw, we will start with you.

Jonathon Bradshaw: Well I don't know why you should start with a whinging pom. I run a research unit in the University of York which is funded by the Department of Health and Social Security, with a very specific commitment to help inform policies for families, particularly in the area of social security. The difficulties of doing that and actually combining research of policy relevance is one of the preoccupations with which we live all the time. If I had more time I would like to talk about all the constraints that we face in doing research for policy - the problems of the commissioning process,

the problems of meeting requirements of policy relevance at the same time as meeting the university requirements of doing work with scientific merit, the onerous problems of disseminating findings to the variety of people engaged in the policy-making process, the importance of developing policy literacy, and a knowledge of the process (i.e. the policy-making process). All these things I would like to talk about, but, in the few minutes I am allowed, I will discuss the problems of the relationship between the research task and the policy-making process.

I think we used to operate with a rational view of the process of policy-making that saw research playing key roles in the identification of need in the formulation of policy, in informing the enactment and in evaluating and reformulation of policy as time went on. We are surely now aware that policy is not made like that and certainly not in England. Indeed, you could say that there is very little policy made at all in England at the present time. But policy when it is made emerges not as a whole nor as a rational process. It survives a kind of political Darwinism; it is not so much that the fittest survive, but for the policy to survive at all, it has to adapt itself to a whole variety of forces - political, economic, administrative and so on. Policy is the settlement of conflicting values and dilemmas. And in this process, research plays only a small part. The relationship between the intellectual world and the institutional process is very diffuse. Social scientists constantly find only a distant echo of their work in legislation. The impact of social research is certainly indirect; in Britain today I expect it plays a bigger part in helping protect what we have rather than informing new programmes. Some of the research we do is clearly commissioned as an alternative to action, to enable ministers to stand up in Parliament and gravely announce that we are busy investigating such and such an awesome and complex problem and in due course will produce research to inform policies.

We often fail to influence policy because our research inevitably fails to provide clear cut, unambiguous or cost free solutions.

Undoubtedly some of our research is wasted because it is set up at one time for one policy agenda and produced at another time with another policy agenda. The best that we can hope is that the knowledge we produce goes into limbo to be picked up in the future. We shoot arrows into the air and they come to earth we know not where.

We also have examples where we have done research which has shown policies to be undesirable but which have nevertheless been implemented because of the political head of steam that has been associated with debate.

Well, despite these gloomy views I am still absolutely convinced of the value of research for policy purposes. Research is rarely direct, is often diffuse and with very long lead times. It undoubtedly has value in raising the level of debate about social problems above the level of common prejudice. It helps to shape the argument and to close off certain views by showing that they are false. It halps to push the debate along. It serves to influence the system of ideas and commitments. And I think that we in the academic world have a challenge about how we can do better in influencing policy. I am sure we should do more about dissemination - the terrible task of disseminating complex ideas and empirical findings to a whole variety of different audiences with different skills. We have certainly got to do more in this area. But also I think we have to do more in getting to grips with and engaging in research on current policy preoccupations. We have to get right in there and employ our skills to help inform even operational matters and to use the relationship that we build up with policy-makers to continue to carry out cesearch which has some academic merit. To do these two things, to provide policy relevance and academic merit at the same time, we have to be very quick on our feet and have a firm political nose.

Pat Troy: I find myself in an ambivalent situation, partly because while my bread and butter comes from policy research activity, I have a very well developed sense of cynicism about its relevance.

I am going to tell you a story which I think illustrates some of the points which Don was raising. If you remember, he suggested that policy-makers have a problem because they often receive too much information or they receive information in appropriate forms, but understand the issues with which they are required to deal. When I look at the list of issues we were given to consider as panel members, and think about the problems of information, about research agendas and who sets them, and I think about the people who make comments, as though decision-making is conducted in some political vacuum disregarding the whole range of political forces that are at work, I am reminded of the time that two public servants from Canberra were in a valley just beyond Queanbeyan. They were in a balloon and a gust of wind caused them to lose their map. They thought they should try to find out where they were, so they decided to come down. They let out some gas, came down a bit and saw a bloke on the ground. One of them called out, 'Hey can you tell us where we are'. And the bloke looked up and said, 'Yes, you are in a ballcon'. And the other chap in the balloon said, 'Isn't it remarkable, wherever you are in Canberra you come across one of those ANU academics'. To which the first one asked, 'How do you know he is an academic?' "Well its obvious, the information he gave us was perfectly accurate and totally useless.'

I am so inured to this sort of response because that information <u>was</u> inappropriate; the chap on the ground did not understand the issues and the blokes in the air coming down rapidly, because someone had shot the arrow in the air, didn't have time to consider an alternative range of options.

I thought part of the exercise tonight was to be a bit laid back and in a sense I wanted to give you a chance to throw a few coconuts. I had, in fact, come along thinking that I was going to be a coconut. I don't want to stand up here and harangue you with my views of the appropriateness of the research agenda or of the various ways public servants and politicians set agendas and then take no notice of the output.

Peter Bailey: Thank you Don. I want to say two things very briefly. First, I want to answer the question 'policy-making, just pragmatism?' with the answer 'no, policy-making, mainly politics'. And when I say mainly politics what I mean is mainly politics in the ordinary sense in which we understand it, mainly bureaucratic politics, and mainly politics as between the Commonwealth and the States.

The second thing I want to say is that policy-making is not something that I believe many of us tend to think of as 'something out there', like Pat's baloon floating around. Policy-making is something which is politics and means action. No Government ever announces a policy unless it means to act, if only for the simple reason that if Government doesn't act, it will get criticised. Therefore policy means action and once you have got onto the policy-making train you have got onto the action train, and, at that point, inevitably bureaucrats and practising politicians takeover from researchers.

I would like to look for a moment at the policy-making process. Researchers obviously produce information which is relevant to action, as they believe, to the policy-making process, and they want to know how to get their research into the system. Well, I would hazard a guess that attractive and exciting as all the projects discussed in this Institute of Family Studies pamphlet are, not one would yield, tomorrow or the next day, a proposal which would be suitable to be put into the policy-making process. I know that is going to make some of you feel rather unhappy, but I feel it is probably true for these reasons.

Policy-making will never result in action in under one year. I defy anybody, except a brilliant man like his Honour Justice Murphy when he was Attorney-General, to produce any type of policy shaped into action in under a year; mostly it takes two and longer. Now that means that the process has got to have a substantial kernel to work on. So the first point to note is that you need something reasonably substantial.

The next thing is to find a sponsor. If it is a major policy, the sponsor has to be a political party (or a leading member of it) preferably one which has hope of having office or holding it. Then, you have to find the sponsor department; it is not good enough to imply to have a sponsor member or Minister; unless you get a sponsor department you will not get your proposal through. For example, the kinds of research that the Institute of Family Studies is doing are peculiarly difficult for the bureaucracy to take on because the bureaucracy is functionally oriented - you have a Department of Social Security, a Department of Health and so on. Families are not functional units; they are units requiring multi-functional service. Therefore to get anything done, if you have a complicated proposal, you will need to get several departmental sponsors and that's where the departmental politics begin. I don't need to say anything more about it, but you can see the point.

Then assuming you have a departmental sponsor or sponsors (and you run the risk that you sponsor departments may fight each other rather than promote the cause), the sponsors have to look around and identify likely outside resistance. Number one target of course is the Department of Finance and its Minister. Number two target follows quite quickly in the form of client departments, because if you're doing something for women, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs will object, if you're doing something for Aborigines then some other department will object and so on. So you've got to find a way through that bureaucratic politicking. This of course is why the time gets taken.

The next thing is that, if it's adventurous, it will venture right into State fields and you'll have the States offside, so another month goes by as you negotiate with States to try to get those bureaucracies and those Governments onside.

Finally, if you manage to get through all these hurdles, you've got to find a moment at which the Government feels that the public will accept the policy. If it is too attractive they'll wait till the next election, and they might lose everything then of course. If it's not attractive enough, you might not get through even then. So all I'm saying is keep going, but don't be too hopeful."

Lionel Murphy: Thank you. I find the subject a very general one. You're talking about pragmatism, policies, research across a wide spectrum in which family law and family studies is only one part. I think that in Australia there are some quite important differences between how policy is worked out in other social legislation. If you look at it broadly, in the Parliament (the national Parliament, as I speak from my own experience and I suppose that's all that I can say that is useful to you) a generation ago debates on social legislation were almost entirely the airing of prejudices, apart from the very technical subjects which were beyond the capacity of members. That simply wasn't good enough. We've changed. The Parliament itself has established committees, standing committees which serve in a way to research the subject, and sometimes extremely well, by bringing experts before the committees. As well, there are the extra Parliamentary organisations doing research into important areas of social reform. The principal one is the Australian Law Reform Commission. Such organisations are valuable tools for informing the Parliament so that the legislation is based, if not on research which would satisfy the academics, at least on an educated basis. Thus the process is no longer simply an airing and throwing of prejudices across the chamber, and that is a very important development.

If you turn to family law and associated matters, what has happened in Australia has been slightly different. The Constitutional Legal Affairs Committee, a standing committee of the Senate made a very important contribution. Unlike most such social legislation this Act didn't come up through the Cabinet, although there was Cabinet approval to bring on the legislation as a Government measure for debate. The family law legislation was also unusual in that it was left as a free vote or conscience vote.

(Tape change - some discussion missed)

It occurred to me very early on in the family law debate that there ought to be a Council to advise on the operation of such legislation and that such a body be built into the legislation to monitor, advise, recommend changes on a continuous basis, and to gather material bout what was happening in the family law area. This body became the Family Law Council and it is doing a good job.

In the closing stages of the process in the Senate it occurred to me that something further was needed before the matter was introduced to the Senate. This was why the inclusion of an Institute in the legislation was somewhat hastily drawn by Parliamentary Counsel, but it was important to have it included. The Institute was created by the Act even though a Director did not come along for some time afterwards because of technical difficulties. It was important to have research into all those matters which would affect stability of the family, to assist with the problems with which the legislators were trying to deal and to have information on a much better basis than hitherto in dealing with such an important subject. I think it is important to understand that in the Parliament there were unanimous votes for these provisions. All political parties understood how important it was to have an educated opinion in voting on these matters. These free vote provisions of course were quite different from other social legislation in that there was not a predetermination by party as to the form of legislation or even on the principles which were to go into it. Rather those individuals who were concerned with the legislation gathered information from whomever they could. Information came from some very experienced people such as the Marriage Guidance Councils, from those who worked in other social fields, those who were concerned in the divorce area, and those who handled many of these social problems. This was an ad hoc kind of information gathering operation, and it now seems that we could do much better than that.

Marie Coleman: Well I suppose, picking up on some of the things that Peter was saying and also some of those things that Mr Justice Murphy was commenting on, I think it's tremendously important when we are talking about making a policy to recognise that it is not only happening at Federal Government leve, it's happening at State Government levels, it's happening at organisational level, it's happening within

bureaucratic structures. And from the point of perspective from which I work, of course, we are very conscious that policies are also being shaped by political forces, in particular political parties, and it is quite wrong to assume there is a thing called policy which is owned by senior bureaucrats in Canberra. It is something we all fiddle around with. As Peter said, we are very much involved in the shaping of options for the Government (although he didn't use those words) which do reflect the views of political parties, which in their turn have been influenced by open processes to which you as researchers can contribute (if you want to join the political parties and push your particular barrows through the processes of our interesting democratic society).

Policy-making is going on all over the place in all sorts of organisations and comes together at some levels in Government. Now having made that sort of rather gratuitous observation of policy-making, I would like to say that when I first came to Canberra what was most lacking in the social field was adequate social administrative data. We quite often spend some time flagellating ourselves about the inadequacies of our present situation, but it is useful to look back over the past ten years and see how much work has gone into producing much superior administrative data to the kind of information which we once had.

I am very conscious, for example, that it has only really been over the past four or five years that the Department of Social Security has been producing its excellent series of statistical monographs coming from data generated by the Department's administration of its income security programmes. The data in those publications tell us a great deal more about what is happening to people and what is happening to families in a very broad sense than we have ever known before. We have certain kinds of access to census data (always a very complicated issue), we have had a limited involvement (and I hear that at the moment it is waning influence, regrettably) from the Australian Bureau of Statistics in support for the education sector, for the social welfare sector, for the health sector, in the production of administrative data from these areas.

Since 1974-75, for example, we now have standardised national series of publications coming out of the Welstat exercise on children in alternative forms of care. We didn't have that ten years ago.

The generation of adequate administrative data, which is nationally standardised, tells us a great deal more about the impacts of social policies on human beings than we quite realise. I have got a great deal of respect for a lot of individual studies which pick up from very small samples a great deal of information about individual behavioural patterns. We can't talk about anything in terms of social policy in any sensible way unless we have adequate administrative data which enables us to relate the outcomes of policies back to what those policies say they are on about.

Don Edgar: Thanks very much Marie. David.

David Scott: I can remember when there wasn't a sociologist in Australia and there was no teaching of sociology. Of course there was life before sociology - political life and progress. So one can well ask the question of Australia, taking it as a sort of laboratory: what is different between now and twenty-five years ago? I think, as Marie said, there are some significant differences. The answer to the question is not just pragmatism or politics. There are some strands of principle which underlie both parties. They are more obviously divergent when one party is in opposition than when its policies are tempered by power, but there are some principles relating to equity and to egalitarianism which are important too. Take for example some of the main progressive developmsnts that have taken place in the last ten or fifteen years. First of all the changing role of women, the way women have had to fight for rights and in many instances have achieved. One might ask: what was the contribution of research? I think research did show how women would advance in many areas and this research helped to strengthen the arguments. But it didn't depend only on research. I think most of the significant social changes, such as in changing from the melting pot philosophy to multi-culturalism, or the enormous change in community attitudes and political responses to the treatment of Aborigines and their rights, have all been started by cause groups, helped in varying degrees by research.

One thinks of, and Marie Coleman will remember, the sort of extraordinary shock with which Australia in the 1960s greeted the news that there were some per cent of women in the workforce. There were no day car facilities for them and that was taken up by researchers so that in a broad way I think research has helped. But I must question now, we must all question, the amount of resources going into research. Research in the social sciences is really gushing out of many centres all over Australia. Most of them are known to us, centres such as the Bureau of Labour Market Research, Social Welfare Research Centre, Institute of Multi-Cultural Studies, Institute of Family Studies, Australian Institute of Criminology and every university policy centre. Further research comes, of course, from social science doctral and masters degrees.

Now how useful is research? In one sense it doesn't have to be practically useful; we would all maintain there is a place for theoretical research. Often research tries to get the best of both worlds - if you criticise it for not being helpful they say it is theoretical research; if you criticise it for being too theoretical, well, they say they really haven't got the resources for rigorous theoretical research. So I would like to see more differentiation about types of research. We have got to prepare research agendas better, decide what research is and get some guidance from policy-makers and others. Obviously we have got to give much more thought to the communication and the presentation of research findings.

Peggy Koopman-Boyden: Well I guess my contribution could be, with respect, to illustrate how we make the connection between the research that we have and the politicians. I would like to give you three examples from New Zealand of the use, misuse and no use of research and policy. Last Wednesday, the New Zealand Government released its latest response to the unemployment situation, currently at 5 per cent of the labour force. You might expect a new economic strategy with a bit of luck; but no, their extremely pragmatic response last week was to suggest that we would put all unemployed youth into the armed forces for a six month bout of non-combatant training. Now my question would be: on what research was that smart idea based?

In the 1975 election campaign, the Labour Government tried to remain in power by offering in the last month of the election a cash bonus to mothers of all babies born after the election. Labour lost the election, but New Zealand nearly got a pro-natalist policy, not after a reasoned discussion of the principles of such a policy, not after research to show that there could have been an increase in the birth rate, but simply as a result of the pragmatic problem of winning elections. This is my example of policy based on not one scrap of research.

We have also recently in New Zealand an example of policy based (if that is the word) on a misuse of research. In about 1973 (I say 'about' because in fact we have had it for longer than that) the Government set up our solo parent benefit, called the Domestic Purposes Benefit. After the Benefit had operated for a year or so, the casual observer, that is, the politician noticed that there was also an increase in the number of solo parents. There was assumed to be then a casual relationship, and so we had a policy which cut the benefit of all solo parents for 6 months. Subsequently, the real research, so to speak, found that there was not in fact a casual relationship between the provision of the benefit and the incidence of solo parenthood. So I am raising the question of the possible misuse of research.

Third, on a somewhat optimistic note, I would like to give a couple of examples of instances where research in my own area has been used well - a very small example, but extremely important to those people who were involved. In Christchurch it was found that most people over the age of 70 couldn't climb the steps into the local buses. We told the City Council and, over the last ten years, they have been replacing the steps on the buses. It is very pragmatic, but directly related to research that we had done.

Also in Christchurch, we found that there was tremendous sexism displayed in the provision of services to older people. Most old people were women, and the tasks that most older people needed help with were tasks that women traditionally can't do - washing windows, mowing lawns, that sort of thing. But in fact it was mainly women who were used to provide services, and what were they providing? Cooking meals and cleaning - exactly the tasks that the older women did't need help with and moreover

could do for themselves. So again this was pointed out to the local community and in the last few years there has been a campaign to get local men involved, a short-term approach, you might say, because obviously we need a somewhat more radical approach to changing such stereotypes.

Now my question is: how do you make the match better between the research and the politicians? How can we made sure that our research is used and, secondly, how can we make sure our research is used appropriately? One possibility is presumably the establishment of an institute. We don't have a social policy institute in New Zealand or a Family Studies Institute. But the example I would like to use for better or for worse is the use of advisory bodies in New Zealand, such as the New Zealand Planning Council. I am a member of this Council and as an independent body we are charged with taking the research and information that is available in the country and turning it into appropriate policy. Next year I am personally charged with beginning a social monitoring process in New Zealand where we will try to establish a set of social indicators from research of academics and others and to work through the policy implications of those.

The question I would like to leave you with though, and the question which I personally have struggled with all the time I have been on this body, is: as researchers, are we, in fact, prepared to buy into making the jump between our research and policy? I believe you have to make a certain ideological sort of jump, as has already been discussed. I believe that in my discipline of sociology, and most other disciplines, many people are not prepared to do that for very good reasons and in many cases shouldn't do it. But I do think that we have to be prepared in some cases to sacrifice some of our own personal beliefs to be able to serve on both sides. Are we prepared to do that and at what cost?

Don Edgar: Thanks very much Peggy. And next is Malcolm.

Malcolm Wicks: Thank you Don. Some of you have had long journeys to get here today. You have had about twelve papers presented to you, all of which are excellent. Some of you have had a large dinner and maybe

even a glass or so of beer or wine. I'm the eighth person to speak to you this evening and I can anticipate the excitement with which you are about to greet my remarks. I guess this is your way of saying welcome to Australia!

I have spent some 15 years in England trying to communicate research ideas to policy-makers on areas as diverse as the inner city, the elderly, and family housing. I totally failed, and therefore I am in a very good position to advise you here on the other side of the world. I think we are all agreed that the policy-making process is irrational. That might be a slightly unfair way of saying policy-making is very complex. It is quite right and proper that research will often be of less importance in determining policy outcomes than many other things such as political ideologies and the crucial value questions that one of our friends addressed herself to in one of the papers. So I think we need to be realistic about the impact that research can make. But probably we can be more optimistic than we have been in the past.

Next, I think we have got to be aware of time scales. To some extent today we spent a lot of time talking about research and policy with the assumption that research should make, perhaps may make, an impact fairly quickly on immediate policy events. This is one kind of research and we need to do it better and to talk about it. But I often think that the role of social science in research is to change the context of debate so that ideas come bubbling to the surface based on the best empirical research data which very often may influence not this particular Government (whatever the Government happens to be in our country) but the Government after that or, indeed, the Government after that. If one sometimes looks at the impact of social science ideas on research on policy over 15 to 20 years, one might be slightly more optimistic. Certainly I think much of the demographic work that we have heard today, Don, is not stuff that parliamentarians are going to whip off to Parliament and try to legislate for, but rather, is a way of educating parliamentarians and the public about the reality of family life away from the kind of stereotype view that we often have in Britain and Australia. And maybe one day that will start to change legislation, procedures and policy.

I think this raises the question about what is the audience for research ideas. I would argue that it is not just Government, Commonwealth or State, or, in my country, central or local Government. Government is important, we have got to address ourselves to that, but I think in a democracy we are all concerned about other kinds of audiences. In Britain at the moment, my own Centre has just published a briefing paper on our new Divorce Bills not for the bureaucrats but for parliamentarians, and we aim simply in the 30 pages to present the facts and the trends and to discuss the issues, bringing to bear on those issues the best available research in Britain: not arguing a line, nor telling the parliamentarians how to vote. We hope that it might influence the debate; we have to see, it is a small step.

I think of the way the public ultimately pays for our research. We have got to address ourselves to them, and this will often mean working through the mass media. I think that in Australia you have got lessons to teach us in Britain on how to do that because the two centres I have stayed at so far, the Social Welfare Research Centre in Sydney and the one I'm about to visit next week, the Institute of Family Studies, seem to me to be much more aware of public communication than many ivory towers are in my own country and I want to learn much more about that. Communication through the media is not without its pitfalls. I remember we published a paper on values in Britain about the family and we presented a pretty dull but very worthy report on this important question. We included a table which talked about what couples valued in their marriage and what is it that really gets them going in a marriage. The Daily Mirror, a well known organ of opinion in Britain, published this worthy document which was chaired by our Dean of Windsor, the Queen's chaplain, under the heading 'No Sex Please We're British'. So there are problems about disseminating material in that way.

In Britain the debate about the elderly and how we are caring for the elderly has become slightly more sophisticated. We don't hear quite so much the view from the media and the public that young people no longer care for their elderly. We are beginning to have a debate in the media, based on some research material, about how we can help families to care for the elderly and what kind of partnership we need between families and State to do that, so let's not be too pessimistic.

But I think what we are talking about is not just research for Government, which is important, but research for democracy because there are more important people than Government, be they Labour or Conservative Governments (or I think you call them Liberal Governments here). This in turn raises questions about the funding of research, questions which are important. If we are to use national survey data which is very expensive to produce, almost the only people who can afford such surveys these days is Government, which gives rise to these questions about funding, if we are to do research for democracy. I think I will end it on that note, Don.

Don Edgar: Thanks very much. Now all you people shake yourselves up and throw a few coconuts at the targets here. Are there any burning comments which people would like to make from the floor or rockets to fire back to members of the panel. Don't be shy. No? Well I shall direct it back to the panel. I'm sure they have various things that they wish they had said before or would like to comment on to one another perhaps.

Pat Troy: I would like to say that implicit in a lot of comments that have been made is some sort of wringing of the hands regretfully saying that it is a pity that the politicians don't implement the research. Well I for one am very glad that the Government doesn't implement a lot of research. I think, for example, that already Governments in Australia have implemented too much of the research based on some crazy notions. I would prefer to see a different sort of research base. This actually opens up a particular problem in our sort of community, our sort of democracy. I think one of the reasons why some of our progressive Governments don't permit research, is that most research comes out of universities and most universities are conservative institutions with a very rigid, conservative, ideological dominant paradigm. This very conservative paradigm is one of the reasons why I think we don't get intelligent debates about a number of these issues. I don't regret the fact that Governments don't charge in. I'm pleased that policy-making is pragmatic; I just hope that the good research is research which really describes and tries to explain or understand what is happening so that we can learn from it after the event. I don't know if too much research in advance of the situation changes the pragmatic approach.

One of the areas of research and one of the areas of policy-making which directly affects the family (and I was reminded of it again when Marie, I think it was) is that since 1945 we have had a dramatic change in the workforce participation of women. Well, the fact of the matter is that the Government institutions and Government organisations in this country haven't recognised or taken cognisance at all of the fact that there is a very significant change in the nature of family relationships and in the way that women are involved in the workforce. This is an area about which I know just a little, namely about the way cities grow and the way we organise our suburbs, but also the principles on which we organise and develop our cities and marshall the finances for that development and the way we locate the jobs and the entertainment facilities and so on. Now it doesn't matter how much research we do about the planning and organising of our cities at the moment, the fact remains that neither the financial institutions or the Government authorities at State, Commonwealth or local level will actually take action to do anything about it. So I regret that, but there is not much we can do about this situation.

David Scott: Just responding to that you have stated the problem, but what can be done about it? If you say there is a large amount of relevant material that is here, whose job is it to see the finance institutions and State and Commonwealth Government Housing Departments take notice of it/ We seem to lack brokers. Either it is the role of the research people - and I think that research institutions don't do enough of this, it is fine to have seminars like this where they can share the knowledge generally - but perhaps there should be an obligation, if you have something that is really relevant in a particular policy area, for that research institution to put some resources into seeing that those findings are taken account of my appropriate bodies; or it is the role of other brokers like, for example, Shelter and Housing Councils and Councils of Social Service. Can you respond to that Pat, or anybody else? Why isn't relevant material influencing the people it should influence?

Lionel Murphy: Well I think there is a very negative attitude to the politicians' approach to research. Let me give you an example. About 12 years ago Jean Aitken-Swan prepared a monograph, I think it was, comparing the position of civilian and war widows. It was published (I don't know how widely) under the auspices of the New South Wales Council of Social Services, but someone had the wit to send a copy of that publication to each member of the Parliament. It wasn't discussed, as far as I know, in the Parliament. It wasn't debated at all. But it had a very powerful effect on the members of Parliament. They read it, they talked about it to one another, and they decided that something had to be done about what this researcher had shown was the position of the civilian widow in Australia, and something was done about it. I think it was done by the then Liberal Government (John Gorton's), but certainly it was acted upon and achieved results because there was work which appeared to be extremely well researched, presented in a way which could be understood, and of extreme importance to a large section of the community. It was acted upon and the civilian widows' position was improved appreciably because of that piece of research. I say this to illustrate the point that it is not much use having this very cynical and negative attitude towards the political process and the legislators. If there is a problem in communicating the results of the research and the importance of it, well then it ought to be tackled and it is just not good enough to brush it all aside with the feeling: 'why waste time because the politicians are too stupid or too full of their own importance or too occupied with other matters to pay any attention to the wonderful things that have been produced in the darkness by our researchers'.

Dr Edgar: There are hands beginning to rise.

Prue Sibree: (Question unclear on tape. It had to do with the establishment of family policy units.)

Peter Bailey: I would like to take that up because it is an issue I think I raised. The difficulty about special units is that they do cut across the functional divisions of departments. Now you can have, where you have a sufficient political push, the Department of Veterans Affairs or Department of Aboriginal Affairs or even, if you like to look at it that way, a Department of Defence because there is a political support for that special department, but they always create problems in

the bureaucracy. The difficulty about the family as the focus of an administrative department (with which I would have personally some sympathy) is that there are many kinds of families. There are single parent families, there are families with children, without children, there are aged parent families, there are all sorts of families and it is frankly very difficult to see how one signle office could really deal with the family. I think that in practical terms that would be the problem. I don't, by the way, denigrate politicians although I think probably my colleague on my left thought I was doing that. I think that politicians are, in fact, at the centre of an enormously difficult process and I was really trying to explain that the forces which go into making politicians work and which allow them to operate are very complicated. That is why things like single-line research is often not able to be got up into reality and I think that that is the sort of problem which we have with this family type unit. It wouldn't be a bad thing if the Government were to try it, but I think there would be great difficulties.

Don Edgar: Thank you Peter. Marie, would you like to comment on the Social Welfare Commission, what it's role was in relation to that question about a special unit?

Marie Coleman: I think Peter is making the point very cogently that it is extraordinarily difficult to separate out a target population from a functional area of social policy evaluation or social policy development. It is extraordinarily difficult to get agreement even as to what a family is. One usually tends, as one goes down the track - whether it is the work of the Kahns or various other people - to find that one comes back to talking about improved social policies rather than about policies for families. Various Governments come up with various kinds of machinery for trying to improve cross-functional policy work. The Whitlam Labor Government established the Hospitals and Health Services Commission in the hospitals and health services area generally, and the Social Welfare Commission which looked at income security and personal services policy issues. We engaged in a certain amount of cross-sector work with people such as Pat's erstwhile colleagues in the Department of Urban and Regional

Development. But it is almost impossible to set up a special policy unit inside Government which is solely about one target population. The last Government did away with many of these separate institutions which the Whitlam Government had established and created a body called the Social Welfare Policy Secretariat which again is charged with the general idea of cross-sector policy co-ordination. Clearly that kind of unit is interested in the impact of a particular policy but it is very hard to know with what one is dealing? For example, I have just been reading a report from Victoria (and David tells me I must be about the only person outside Victoria who has a copy), which reviews policy on children's services in that particular State. The whole committee split about the issue of whether children's services were for children or for families or, for that matter, for communities.

These ideological questions are very difficult to address. The whole issue of income security policies related to support of families and their relationship with tax policies has been a very heavily ideological area in the past few years as people have tried to consider if they are more interested in income security and tax policies which would support individuals or support people as family units; what kind of impact tax splitting proposals have; whether we have social security policies which put a particular value implicitly on a particular family structure, which may or may not be what the rest of Australia really regards as an ideal situation.

I don't think you can just assume very easily that we know what is good for families or even if we quite know what families are.

Don Edgar: Thank you, now I have a line up of people with questions. Can you use the microphone please.

Eva Cox: I find myself in a dilemma listening to this discussion because I am both researcher, lobbyist, non-Government sector, and for the last few months I have been a public servant in one of the attempted, special interest offices. I can say I agree with Marie and Peter that it is extremely difficult to have a special interest group office and try to impose things across the public service. One of my concerns is that I think there is a real gap appearing here today between the public servants and the researchers with something of a stereotyping of both.

I have done policy research, I have used it in the lobbying process and I am now sitting on the other side trying to do something about policies. Today I was in a meeting with some other people trying desperately to respond to a paper on maintenance, and the scream around the room was 'How can we respond to this paper when we actually have no facts and figures about what we are talking about?' There is still a really serious problem in trying to get the sort of data which can be used quickly and easily and effectively in the policy-making process. It is a lesson which Australian researchers still haven't learnt of being able to produce information or data that a policy-maker can pick up and say, 'well if you do that, you are actually going to disadvantage 40 per cent of families even though you might advantage 10 per cent of families'.

In other discussions this afternoon on taxes, the same sorts of things have come up about not knowing enough because we do not have that base data. I would really like to support the point that Marie made, that we don't collect enough information to have base data. In some cases I think the sort of research we do is a luxury because it doesn't contribute too much to the development of policies on that sort of level. I rend to support what Peter said about some of the Institute's research projects not finding immediate policy proposals. But in the various issues at which I'm looking at the moment, there might actually be something of interest to me in some particular areas mentioned in the Institute's projects. I work at the moment in the Office of the Status of Women. A lot of the issues the Institute is researching are very relevant to the sorts of issues that we are raising.

We also need to talk much more about the sorts of things that Peggy was mentioning. How do we actually fund very pragmatic, practical research which answers questions which need to be answered? I have learnt as a contract researcher (which I have done on various occasions) that the first question to ask when someone says 'I am interested in doing a piece of research', is 'What are you going to use it for?' I would like to put that up as something that I think should be in the mind of any researcher with any pretentions to be involved in policy. What are the decisions that are going to be made? When are the decisions going to be made? Is there any relationship between the data gathering process that you are undertaking at the moment and the decision?

If not, why not, and if not, are you prepared to go ahead and do a piece of research in the knowledge that it would probably float off into somebody's filing cabinet? Or are you prepared to make a commitment to the results of that research, picking up and lobbying and pushing because what you have is something which is practical, usable and which would benefit the people that you have researched?

Don Edgar: Briefly, in setting up the Institute we faced, of course, that exact question. Fortunately Justice Murphy had worded, or his people had worded, the Act rather broadly, so that the purpose of the Institute was to improve an understanding of factors affecting marriage and family stability. Now I as the first Director had to decide what sort of research we would do and I chose to do base line research, rather than direct practical policy oriented or special group oriented research. It was not all a simple sort of decision. This decision was criticised in some quarters because a number of people wrote to me, saying they wanted finance to do a study of very specialised groupings for example, one parent mothers of adopted children and similar minor little bits and pieces. But I stuck to my position and said we are doing a national study of family formation processes; a national study of divorced people who have been through the Family Court (which turnout out to be, for various administrative reasons, less than a national sample); a broad study of family support networks; and family policy studies that were directed at functional units. It has been a long debate in the Institute, because my original thought was to do a large scale monitoring of policy impacts using a panel of families. But we very soon found there was no such thing as a static family that could be represented in such a panel study, simply because one parent families become married families, become de facto families, become remarried families and so on.

So the debate within the Institute led us toward more restricted, if you like, policy oriented research which looked at housing impacts on families, welfare impacts on families, taxation impact on families. It was a very crucial decision that we would get base line research and we would have samples which would be large enough to compare across groups. One is hoist on one's own petard to some extent.

Because we made that decision, we were criticised by those who wanted us to do immediate practical policy oriented research on specific interest groups. However now it is paying off because, when we talk about specific interest groups, we do have the comparative base line figures to say they are really not very much different from this other lot, or that they do differ crucially in these particular ways.

Eva Cox: Can I just ask one question of the panel. Given what you said can I ask the panel: who is going to provide the information for setting up a National Maintenance Collection Organisation which was the issue we were trying to canvass today" I think it is a very real issue about who does pick up that sort of very practical information and I would like some feedback.

Don Edgar: Yes, a lot of discussion this afternoon was about the inadequacy of statistics within the family court system. The Institute has been active in bringing to attention this inadequacy, but our efforts, as I explained, have only partially succeeded. It is a basic problem; good base line data is needed and the only people who can collect it are those involved in the ongoing legal process. My belief is that small scale studies, little forays out into the field, are of no real value. You do need, as Marie called it, the basic administrative data, being collected regularly on a national scale. One has to convince all sorts of people that this is what is needed. Are there any comments from people on the panel before I pass it over?

Adam Jamrozik: Thank you Mr Chairman. I think the discussion so far has been very interesting, however, it causes me some concern. It has been a well known fact for many years, well illustrated in literature, that politicians and Governments, will use, will ask for research, which validates the decisions they have already made. I think that is legitimate as long as one understands it taking into account that politicians are supposed to be committed to certain parties, certain interest groups and so on. I think it is, or it should be, or some concern when something happens in the field of research. I see a great difference between say committed research based on certain values and research which is nothing more than a lobby. I think that, in the past few years, we have seen quite a lot of research commissioned

by Government, initiated by various groups, which actually is lobby research. Let me give you an example: this is a family research conference and I would like to say that I fully appreciate what has been happening in this field, and what I heard this morning. However, it is dull stuff, it doesn't excite very much but it is factual, it gives an understanding of what is happening in the process of family formation. Indeed very significant changes in family formation have occurred, but the prevailing research has been a projection of an image of two income and one income families in the middle and upper class bracket. I believe it is these interests which have prevailed, have put pressure on the Government and consequently we see their interests in taxation and in various areas of Government policy. It is the interests of these families that have been projected and taken care of.

Increasingly in our society we see that in the lower income brackets we have a one income family or no income family or unemployment income family. Yet is is rather unfortunate that much research, as it were, becomes a lobby for families of the middle and upper class brackets (and good luck to them) but I think we ought to acknowledge there are other forms of family. As a researcher I would like to ask that we take note of all families. I see a big difference between research and a lobby and we ought to separate the two. I think that if someone receives money, say Government money, to produce research, I think that person or that organisation is bound to present committed research. This commitment ought to be stated, but it ought not to become a lobby. I believe that we see something of an unholy alliance in that some researchers (I don't include all of them) are playing political games while they ought to be playing the research game.

Don Edgar: Any comments on that from the panel or from the floor? Anything else people want to raise. Meredith.

Meredith Edwards: I feel that I have got something to contribute here having been a researcher for some time and now a (very new) policy-maker working within the bureaucracy hoping to have some influence on policy. And I want to say to researchers, that when I was a researcher, I was too hesitant in saying to policy-makers 'what are the burning issues you need answers to?' Now that I am in the policy process, I am very

conscious that policies often have to be made without the relevant data. For instance, I am working at the moment with young people and their income support issues. I will give you three examples of such questions: 'Who makes the decision about whether a child or young person leaves school? Is it the parent or is it the child? The answer to that question could determine or have some input into the payment mechanism that one adopts. The second question is: who benefits from part time work amongst approximately one quarter of young people who are at school and have part time work? Is it young people from poorer families, lower income families or higher income families? The answer to that question could have a bearing on the direction we go in our participation and equity programme. The third question is (and it is a very vexed one): what sort of financial arrangement do parents and young people in families make? What happens when a young person does take on part time work? What happens to the pocket money? What happens to the housekeeping money? and so on. These are really crucial policy questions that we don't have answers to and we may not be able to get answers to.

What I'm going to do when I go back into research is to go to the policy-makers in relevant areas and say 'What are the questions that you need answers to? Although we don't have formal mechanisms for that kind of communication to occur, particularly for individual researchers, we will have to use our initiative in this way.

Davis Scott: Just to comment on that. Why don't you ask some of the appropriate institutions? I think what is happening now is interesting in that we have three research institutions entirely funded by the Government - Social Welfare Research Centre; the Institute of Family Studies; and the Institute of Multicultural Affairs. From my experience on the advisory committee of the Social Welfare Research Centre, everybody has leant over backwards in Government, particularly in the Department of Social Security, not to influence that centre. I imagine the same thing with the Attorney-General's Department and the Institute of Family Studies. So, I think, you have the curious situation where some departments and ministers are reluctant to ask these sorts of bodies to carry out specific research that would be helpful to them for fear of being accused of wanting to run, or distort, the research programmes or agendas of those bodies, and they are just not asking the questions as clearly as they should.

Don Edgar: Pat would like to make a comment.

Pat Troy: You also have another kind of pressure which operates in this environment, and that is in situations where bureaucrats strongly pressure their ministers to engage in research programmes which they don't really need when what they really need to do is to make pragmatic decisions. One of the reasons why I suspect that they don't make the decision is that they are frightened. They don't actually advise their ministers properly and their ministers end up being cosseted in a way in which they can't gainsay the accumulated wisdom of seried ranks of bureaucrats.

I am actually faced with a situation at the moment where I have been asked to do some research into the problems of housing, accommodation supply, for low income families in a city in Australia. The project has been delayed for 15 months because I wrote to the Minister and said, 'Your problem isn't that you lack research. Your problem is that, either you're getting bad advice or you lack political will, and what you really ought to do is go out and solve the problem by starting to provide some low rent accommodation for those families.'

He then referred this to his bureaucrats and they said 'Oh no, we need lots of research'. So, 15 months later we reluctantly agreed to go on with the project. It is not often researchers turn down a $50,000 research contract. We did that because we thought that the Minister was getting bad advice. We did say it was intrinsically interesting, but what he needed to do was to get on and build some accommodation or get some in the public ownership so that it could be provided, and to set up a monitoring system so that at a subsequent date the information would be available for those people who need it to make a critical evaluation of the policy.

I am half way in agreement with the sort of position that eva takes, but I also find myself in a position of disagreement. I don't agree that all research should be specified by the policy-makers, because from the illustration just given, the policy-makers are doing the wrong thing by their clients and by the Minister and by the whole

political process. I think the $50,000 will produce some information, but nevertheless the Minister could make the decision today. He just needs to have about $150 million to solve the problem. The bureaucrats prefer to spend just $50,000 to fudge the issue by putting the decision off for another nine months saying, as they are now doing, 'Well we can't do anything about this issue' when the various pressure groups, interest groups, take representations to Ministers. The Minister gets a briefing from his public servant to say 'mustn't do anything - research in progress'. And we researchers are now being used as the cat's paw in the situation. So it is not all a one way process.

Jonathon Bradshaw: I operate in a rather different research institute to the Institute of Family Studies and the Social Welfare Research Centre because we are rather more attached to the policy-making process. I think that Australia should be very wary about following the model we have which is a customer contractor model in which the customer says what is wanted; we do it and the customer pays. Things actually don't work like that because customers are incapable of identifying researchable subjects. The job of the research unit, which is doing policy related research, is rather like being goalkeeper. You move from side to side in the goal, wondering where the next demand is going to come from. To meet the kind of immediate needs that are identified you have to set up an infrastructure capable of answering them. To get good quality answers to what are very difficult problems, to answer decently, empirically, and rigorously is fundamentally very difficult. The problems are not things that can be answered without having the infrastructure there to provide answers and the expertise in the fields in which you are operating. You just can't commission researchers to answer those questions. The infrastructure has got to be there already.

Unidentified Speaker: It seems to me that the needs, requirements of researchers and policy-makers are often different. The perspective of a researcher is to describe the world, the need of a policy-maker is to change the world and the degrees of certainty we can expect in either of those processes are very different. It would seem to me that one of the aspects we are not addressing in this debate is that policies are supposed to make some sort of significant change

in the world. One of the requirements of any policy, I believe, is that changes a policy would bring about should be describable and, in a sense, a bit like a theory. A policy you should say is going to make these sorts of changes to the world. I think it is the role of researchers to say 'that is a likely hypothesis' or 'that is a pretty unlikely sort of phypthesis' and the role of policy-maker or politician (if they are firmly committed to a particular line) is to go out and have that policy tested, and to change that policy if experience in some sort of countable, testable way shows it doesn't work. If we take that approach to the relationship between policy and research, then some of the dichotomies that we see would be lessened because we would recognise the different roles that the two participants in that process have.

Fred Robinson: I would just like to say a word or two about setting the research agenda because I'm in a policy advisory position. It strikes me that the two times I get called on most often as a rational thinker in the bureaucracy by the politicians is first, when there is money involved and we have to fight against another State and present a rational argument on why our State should get more than somebody else; and secondly, when Governments change and want to implement some new policies. At these times the Government wants to know how well the old programmes, or, in most cases, how badly the old programmes, are doing. That has a lot to say about what Eva, and Marie and Peter are saying about setting the research agenda. It strikes me that one of the areas that we need to know about is the social environment and that is why the base line type data that the institute is developing, or the census data, is extremely useful at the State level in that it is flexible. We can use pieces of it for particular programmes. The problem we have as a State out on the fringe of the world is that often the sample sizes are too small such as in Western Australia, Tasmania and the Territories. If there was more of an emphasis on the importance attached to generating the base line social data, then we could look at increasing the sample sizes, so that we don't have to do some of the ridiculous things we saw trying to be done with the ethnic data for a sample of 500 (nationally) today.

Likewide we can't really talk about how we can set a research agenda, until we know how effective our programmes are, and there has been very little said about evaluation in this evening's discussion. Evaluation strikes me as an important building block. Until we get that administrative by-product data from our social programmes we are not going to be able to do much of a job of evaluating the services that we deliver for which taxpayers are paying. Once we get that social environment described fairly well and once we get our evaluative data, then I think a lot of this specific research task, the research agenda, follows on quite easily because we can isolate those areas that need the small studies that need particular studies that are not amenable to large data collection. But until we do that, we will still be doing a hit and miss job of defining the research.

Unidentified Speaker: I just had my hypothesis proven. If you wait long enough the question you wanted to ask will be asked for you. I have been a bit concerned about the reification of research in this discussion. I am aware of the difficulties of research in this area. Once I was having a discussion with a town planner and he said that by the time you have done research on where the roads should be put, people will want to go somewhere else. But one of the things concerning me is that we are talking about research as if it is a reified or institutionalised thing in itself. I would like to put the view that as well as research which is aimed at helping us take action on more informed assumptions, we also need research to see how things work. We have been talking a lot about base research, but I would like to hear some talk about action research, into seeing how things work, how well they work and seeing what happens so that the courses of action which do work are implemented.

Lionel Murphy: Of course you are talking about an extremely broad area, about research which might relate to administrative policies or administrative action, and about research which might relate to legislative policies or legislative action. One of the very important developments in recent times to which I referred earlier was what has happened in the legislative area. The legislature has started to arm itself with the instruments to enable it to do its job properly.

There are the committees which I mentioned, and recently the amendments to the Family Law Act were preceded by the Joint Committee on the Family Law Act which examined the operation of the act and all the matters associated with it, so that members of Parliament in both Houses and all parties were able to involve themselves and have access to all the research which was available in the country. The instruments have been created, Parliament is getting used to using them, and this is one of the most valuable ways for decision-makers to gain access to what research there is, and for them to suggest other means of research if they wish.

The Parliament is starting to work in many of these areas efficiently. It may not appear so from the daily newspapers which are more concerned about who is thrown out or who is abusing somebody else, but in the committee rooms of the Parliament a great deal of very useful work is being done. The results of research are being brought up and being made available to the decision-makers who are then able to act on them. There is no reason why the same shouldn't be done in the administrative area. I think that perhaps the more slowly it is being done the more likely that the administrators will set up the instruments to enable them to have access to research and, if it is not good enough, to set something in train to see that they do get the facts and advice that they need.

Peter Bailey: I want to say something to those of you who are administrators. It seems to me that the administrative group has not learnt how to use research properly. It seems to me that one of the things that those of us who can influence Government ought to be doing, is running, or getting the Public Service Board to run, the sort of training programme that will tell people within the administration the kinds of things they can and can't expect to get out of the research that they contract out. We have had to go through this in the Human Rights Commission recently where we have a small, but I believe effective, research programme. It is very costly in time if you are really going to define what you want researched. But unless you can work out and spend perhaps weeks or months working it out, you won't get the value that you want from the research.

The other thing is that we, as administrators, have to learn (and I draw this from my own experience in the Commission again) is how to operate without closing the options which we may be given to pick up when results of that commissioned research are available in one or two years time. That I think is a skilled and important task, and should be remembered by administrators. Don't commit or close your doors, because if you have research going on you must build flexibility in, because very often you can't wait for the year or two years that any worthwhile research involves before having to take some action.

The other thing to pick up is what Don Edgar said which I was very encouraged to hear. In this Institute I hope you will adhere to this broad base research because I am still worried about what the lady (Prue Sibree) asked about in having a centre, a bureaucratic centre, for family policy. I agree with everything that Marie said on that and I would just like to go one step further and say this: that politics, in the way that we normally see it, is about people opposing each other, but, probably at a more basic level, it is about consensus. Until we have some kind of consensus about what the family is, about what the family needs, about where the family is going, we will never be able to get that kind of family unit, because everybody will be talking fractionally about the single parent, or as somebody was mentioning, the individual problems. If Don Edgar and this Family Institute can get to a point where we really have an idea of what the family is, where it is going and where it should go, then I think there is a real possibility that we may have some kind of unit within the bureaucracy where politicians can pick up the research consensus and then the gathering community consensus and do something within it. But until we can set an idea of what the family represents, we won't get a bureaucratic unit.

Peggy Koopman-Boyden: One of the very practical things that I have learnt as a researcher and as a policy advisor is that there is a political calender and that thou shall not make policy suggestions immediately before an election. Thus if you have got some research that you consider is interesting, don't make it available within two months of an election, but do make it available within the two months after the election, because that is when policies are being made by a new or old Government. The other point that I have learnt is that the

time to move mountains with respect to your policy conclusions is when a select committee is set up. Now I think it likely that a few mountains are being moved at the moment with respect to assets testing for old age pensions. In New Zealand, a few Mt Cooks are being moved also because we have a select committee which is going to report in only three months on the status of the elderly in New Zealand. I figure that we won't get such a commission considering that topic for at least another 5 to 10 years, and so a lot of us are really moving an awful lot of mountains. I would suggest as a very practical point that a study of political calenders is extremely useful because timing of suggestions to policy-makers is important.

Don Edgar: Thank you very much Peggy. Frank you wanted to say something.

Frank Maas: I was going to observe that there seems to be a sub-culture that surrounds the policy research area. We see the comings and goings of experts in and out of Governments, the Meredith Edwards once out of Government into Government, the Eva Coxs in and out, the Pat Troys in and out, and even the David Scotts in and out into various positions. I think David was going to write a book From City Square to Spring Street or something like that. My comments relate to the effect of these influences. There times, perhaps in the Whitlam era, when we could see policy outcomes influenced in direct lines for example from Shelter through David Scott to Mendelsohn, and from Troy through to Uren, into some sort of policy. There were linkages, coalitions that seemed to work from the outside fairly effectively (but I suppose tortuously from the inside). Perhaps people might comment on that, or about what other outcomes there might be, or about the same old set of ideas rattling around more varied tracks.

David Scott: I think that people who do have ideas and want to influence things have got to work much harder at it and establish better strategies and techniques of doing so in appropriate ways, particularly when there are Labor Governments in the Common-ealth and the States, because in a way they don't have an opposition in one respect. What I mean is that the people who were the critics or 'progressives' are the ones that are now identified with the Government but who get compromised by all the compromises that the Government

has to adjust to now. I think that there is a tendency for Labor Governments to rely very much on their policy committees and have a bit of a closed shop on criticism. If you are not in the party and on one of their policy committees, it is difficult to get much notice taken of you. So I think the strategies and the techniques have got to change. The general point is that it is not necessarily the role of researchers, but it is of certain organisations. There is a need to draw both researchers and organisations together to formulate some more comprehensible and comprehensive policies. All the sorts of things we have heard today and we are going to hear tomorrow are useful and worth doing in their own right, but there doesn't seem to be anybody drawing them together and then working out the most appropriate strategies for seeing, not necessarily for forcing, that Governments take policy suggestions into account.

Marie Coleman: Picking up a little bit from what Frank was just raising, at different times Governments will change their views about the merits of interchangeability of senior advisors being from among career bureaucrats or from outside the Government system. It is obviously fairly well known that it is the policy of the present Government to amend the Public Service Act in such a way that it will be easier for lateral recruiting to occur at the policy level. How immediately that kind of thing is suggested, there are cries that this will destroy the Westminster system that we have come to know and love. Perhaps it will, perhaps it won't. But it seems to me that the opening up of short term (though one could mean six months, two years or whatever) kinds of exchanges between the senior levels of policy advising of Governments and the academic setting, the business world or whatever, is one of the ways in which we would certainly get a better circulation of ideas. It is not quite the same as dealing with the getting of more research impact on the policy-makers, but it may of course have the same effect. If quite a lot of people, who are engaged in academic research for example, have the opportunity to work inside Government, some of them may learn a lot more about what Peggy has called the timing agenda. They may learn a lot more about the sheer realpolitik of being inside Government and what sorts of things look as if they may be able to work and what sorts of things may not be able to work. There is a great need I think to break down those artificial barriers in terms of people's understanding of how policy advising and administration does

work, and conversely what it is like to be on the outside putting up ideas. I am a very strong believer in the value of rotation of persons through the Public Service, but then that is because I'm not a career bureaucrat.

Don Edgar: Malcolm, have you got a comment on that from a British point of view?

Malcolm Wicks: I'm not sure if I want to come into that directly. I think there is a sense in which we have't quite specified what we mean by research. One or two people have tried to talk about different types of research, such as action research, but much of the discussion has rather assumed fairly short term bits of primary research based on fairly immediate policy considerations and I think that there are other sorts of research. I sometimes wonder what would happen if Governments and bureaucrats called the bluff of the social science world and actually said 'well look, we haven't got time for the nice national survey that you would actually like, but we have an issue coming up and we are going to bring together the best people around, not just from the pure research world but from other worlds as well. We are going to ask them to tell us about this problem and to advise us on what the policy options might be? Don't tell us we need a huge national sample to do this. Of course we do, but if anyone can tell us, shouldn't it be the social scientists'. I just wonder sometimes what would happen, because I think there is a sense in which bureaucrats do regard the researchers in a narrow way as people who go off and do private research rather than as a more general resource.

One of the problems is that while a lot of social scientists are involved in social policy, many of them aren't actually that politically literate. This is certainly true of my own country. It may be quite different here. Social scientists do not understand the policy process, and have never met a bureaucrat or politician. In that sense there is a need for education. As well, we have a very closed system of Government, and administrators and politicians aren't telling the outside world - researchers or public - what might be on their policy agenda, this week, next year or over the next 5 or 10 years.

They are not very good at saying that these are the things we are beginning to get anxious about and asking if social scientists could now start getting to work on the longer term bits of research, so that in five years time we have the best available data.

Don Edgar: I think that is very important.

Unidentified Speaker: I would like to follow on from what Malcolm was saying and the other speakers have said, especially from the point of view of the functionality of research. It seems as though the majority of speakers have said that research is only useful if it is functional in terms of meeting the needs of particular problems at particular times. I think that view would be as extreme as that which wants to just concentrate on theoretical research. The concentration only on functional research would possibly simply confirm or maintain the society as it stands, rather than add any new ideas or perhaps new movements or new directions away from the status quo. That is the first thing I would like to say.

The other is, that I think things are only going to be acted on, or decisions are only going to be made, when they are considered to be important. It was obvious from what Lionel Murphy said, about the example he cited of widows needing some particular service which all the politicians considered needed to be done. It was perhaps because politicians at that point felt that aged people were important or they felt that society was feeling guilty in general about the treatment of aged people and what was being done for them. At that point in time, this issue may have struck a note and something was done. Equally I would imagine there is a lot of other information that goes through the parliamentary system and to politicians about which nothing is done. I doubt if every bit of information or research is acted upon.

A further point is that research is rarely conclusive and there is a danger of making research a God to which everyone bows. From my experience, at least in the human relationship area, so much research seems contradictory that in the end you are left with big questionmarks all the way through. One year it is okay to belt children, the next

year you shouldn't touch them, or whatever. But, in general I think you have got to be very careful about the use of research and its conclusions because they are limited, facts are not necessarily truths, they are limited to a point in time and they are limited by the perspective or point of view of the researcher. There is a great danger that decision-making is going to become, in my opinion, more and more based on research to the point where dependency will be created. There is a possibility that people will be asking, 'Well tell us what to do?' Then it will be interesting because I doubt if a social scientist could come up with conclusive statements about things which may not, in view of future research, be validated and then any decision made may be regretted. In short, what I'm saying is that decisions based on research may be no more valid that decisions made by using other methods such as experiential ones.

Finally, I would like to say 'Where are the politicians?' We are talking about making decisions, about the value of research. There is no one on that panel who is a politician. Perhaps that is an indication of the ranking that research takes amongst politicians nowadays.

Don Edgar: Can I just say that was a deliberate decision. We do have an ex-Senator, Lionel Murphy. I think he would lay claim to having been a politician and there are some politicians in the audience listening.

Pat Troy: We are all politicians, that is the point. We all take a particular view of our society. We take a critical view of whatever information is available and decide to engage in social actions to bring about a particular desired social end. I can't accept the dichotomy implicit in the sort of questioning that suggests somehow that politicians are different from the rest of us and are less intelligent than the researchers. That is all wrong. They are all part of, and must be part of, our community. We are all, in that sense, at all times, politicians. I am an academic and I am a politician and I cannot be any different. I challenge any one of you to honestly gainsay that about yourself.

Don Edgar: We'll give a last comment to the person in the gallery.

Phillip Ruddock, M.P.: I thought I should speak because I am one of the parliamentarians present. As I was Chairman of the Joint Select Committee on the Family Law Act that Mr Justice Murphy referred to, I thought it appropriate that I should add some remarks as one of those who has had a great deal of difficulty in obtaining access to the information about which you all speak. The first observation I should make is that, in this area, there are not the political differences that you surmise. If the Joint Select Committee proved anything, it proved that the divisions are within political parties, not between political parties. You only have to look at the dissents in that report to be able to appreciate the nature of the divisions to which I am referring. And secondly, I think you have to know something of the agenda of parliamentarians, the pressure under which they work, and the amount of time they have to devote to one particular area of interest. I think if any of you were researching in 20 or 30 areas at the one time, and looked at the nature of your outcome, you would judge it quite deficient in any one of those 20 odd areas. The fact of the matter is that parliamentarians are approached by many people, and they seek to direct their attention to areas which are of interest to those who do the approaching. They seek information out and in many cases they seek to find out who is researching in a particular area, active in a particular area and likely to be able to assist them with information. Very often they seem to get short hand briefs from the Parliamentary Library in areas which are of interest to them, to identify problem areas, but there are very few universities or institutions that send details of their research to parliamentarians. The Institute of Family Studies does, it is one of the few organisations that does that. The Law Reform Commission does it also. Mr Justice Kirby is a very effective publicist in drawing attention to the work his organisation is undertaking and he also takes time to seek out parliamentarians, those who have an interest, or sometimes those that don't, with a view to cultivating an interest in the matters on which his organisation has been undertaking research. I think that is very important. It is important that those who have information

not only put it in the mail, but seek out those who might have an interest to inform them. I think in that way it will be a two-way street. Mr Justice Murphy has mentioned the ways in which the Committees of Parliament are working and I believe they are very effective but they are still a very inadequate tool. (Remainder inaudible)

Don Edgar: Thank you very much indeed. I think that on that note we will end this evening's discussion. Would you please now thank all the members of the panel for giving up their time.

CLOSING ADDRESS AT FIRST AUSTRALIAN FAMILY RESEARCH CONFERENCE

By Don Edgar

I hope that you have enjoyed the conference as much as I have and as much as the staff of the Institute have enjoyed it. Much of the thanks for the success of the conference must go, of course, to my staff and particularly to David Keane, Frank Maas and Rhonda Carrington, who have carried the organisation of it for many months, a very big task. Our thanks also must go to the staff of the Centre for Continuing Education at the Australian National University. I don't think I've seen a conference, or been at a conference that has been so well organised, with such little fuss. We had to rely upon the Centre to work for us from a distance and they've been marvellous. I refer particularly to Judy Pearce, Dot Davis, Brandan O'Dwyer (who was responsible for the marvellous song and dance act last night) and Robin Brown, and I think applause is appropriate.

There has been a wide range of material. We've all got a case of information overload or indigestion as the case may be. It has been an excellent exchange of information. I'm hoping that you will take the papers home, read them carefully, and get in touch with people whose work is of particular interest.

The conference has indicated some quite large gaps in Australian research on families, but has also filled in many of the empty spaces. I guess that after the first few years of operation of the Institute I am delighted to see so much work actually coming to fruition. We don't lay claim to half of that of course. Some of the research is our own, some of it is the result of support grants from the Institute, much of it we have been involved with in terms of informal exchange. But it's really very heartening to see so many gaps being filled in at the conference by people from all across the country. The conference was designed to do that and I think it has succeeded in bringing those people together.

There is one very important issue that I want to mention first of all. I want to retract, just in case there has been any misconception, a statement that I made at the Wednesday night policy discussion. Those

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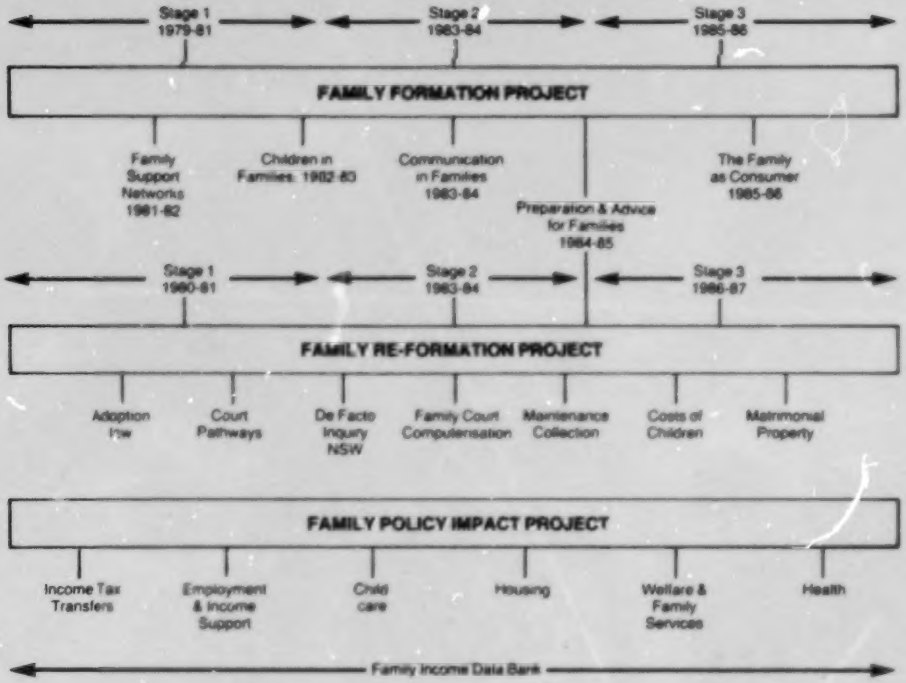

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of you who know me no doubt know what I meant, but I think some of you perhaps may have got the wrong impression. I don't want anybody to go away with the idea that *either I or the Institute have a narrow* view of research. The statement I made was, 'When I took the job of Director I did so on the understanding that the last thing Australia needed was another organisation which would conduct narrowly theoretical research and publish its findings in academic journals read by few and capable of influencing no-one'. That statement means exactly what I say now. I have an abhorrence of vague, waffly theoretical sociology with which I think our universities are riddled. I do want research to be practice-oriented and policy-oriented and to direct itself to the real issues of Australian families. But I do not mean at all by that, that there should not be theory. In fact if anything, this conference has lacked theory. That is partly because of the sort of research that has been done so far. It may be partly also because of the impression given on the first day that the large-scale empirical data sets, the analysis of Census material, ABS data and of the national surveys in a broad demographic approach, seemed to be what was favoured. That I think is a misreading of the papers that were given on the first day. Most of those papers in fact have a great deal of theory behind them, but they tend to come across as heavy with data, empiricism, figures, statistics and so on. We do need those broad-based administrative data sets we discussed on Wednesday in the Panel Session night. But statistics alone do not tell the story and facts do not 'speak for themselves'. These broad statistical analyses have to be balanced with very detailed, small-scale, qualitative process studies. That's why I have put up on the screen a slide of the IFS research programme. The shaded areas represent the large scale data sets, the longitudinal studies, the broad studies the Institute has set up in order to get good representative samples. The lines coming off at the bottom of these broad study areas show the very detailed and qualitative studies which we have designed into the research programme. With every study we have tried to map in qualitative process studies with the larger data sets. I think some of the strengths of this conference have been those papers based on research with small samples where very detailed analyses have been done to spell out how people negotiate their lives under specific

circumstances given different and unequal resources. In other words we do not need only descriptive research. There is great need for that; we need to know what is happening and how that compares with what has gone on before. But we also need to explain things. I suppose another slight disappointment on my part was that there was perhaps too little imagination or daring in extrapolating beyond the data, in taking guesses, in forming hypotheses and generating theories which attempt to explain what is going on. If we don't explain, if we don't spell out, or attempt to spell out, the conditions which give rise to the changes we are reporting, we don't really go very far and certainly we don't even begin to grapple with the need of policy-makers to understand what is going on and what needs to be done.

Explanations must be looked for and those explanations are very likely not based only on description. The policy spinoff must come from looking for theoretical constructs and categories. In that sense our theoretical constructs and categories must become more sophisticated. I've always felt that family research, family sociology, suffered from being too low level, too practical, too common-sense, too taken-for-granted. As researchers get stuck in the categories: the nuclear family, the traditional family, the extended family, the one parent family and so on. Instead of going beyond those categories to ask what are the processes that lie beneath changes in their structures, explanations tend to be looked for within the descriptive categories themselves. I don't think we will get anywhere doing this. A number of papers at the conference have suggested how far we can go if we look beyond family type and look at the underlying constructs that perhaps explain the changes.

I suggest that we should look beyond the common-sense explanations for the reverse of common-sense explanations. Most sociological work is accused of being either too comon-sense or too jargon-ridden for anybody to make sense of, but the best of sociology does precisely the reverse. It shows that the taken-for-granted is not an adequate explanation of what is going on. For example, it has always been emphasised that traditionally, men and women have certain 'natural' functions, that is, the old view that males should work in the public realm and women in the home, in the kitchen, with the kinder and so on.

If you really think about it, the current changes and challenges to the 'traditional' nuclear family setting suggest that this is not a natural division of labour at all. It has been challenged and varied in societies throughout history. That very challenge or even the existence of anti-feminist groups, shows that this division of labour is not a natural division of labour. We researchers have to explain why there are changes. There are groups fighting against new forms of the family on the grounds that they are unnatural, but the very fact of the existence of new family forms means they are indeed natural. Perhaps social conditions now require a range of family forms.

There is also the non-obvious view (and I put this to you as an example of where theory should begin to inform our research) that the family and sexual relations exist as part of a system of stratification. It is very much a system of stratification because it is a matter of the distribution of property within society. Family relations are always relations of property. Nor are they static forms of property. They are, as I've said, produced by certain social circumstances. I'd like to follow Randall Collins' (1982) distinctions here. He talks about the nature of marriage as a shifting balance between three forms of property - sexual property, generational property (meaning children) and household property.

Property is never just a thing. Property is not an object, property is a relation, a social relationship which leads to a way, or describes a way, in which people act towards things. You act towards land or towards a person or towards money in a particular way and that's what makes it property. The key to property in any sense is the right of possession, the right to keep others out and have society's support for those rights. In that sense, marriage is essentially sexual property, a dexual property relationship in which two people negotiate 'exclusive' sexual rights to one another. I use 'exclusive' in inverted commas as it varies through history and among societies, but it is a contract for exclusive access to sexual rights between people. If you doubt that, ask yourself why adultery has always been punished or regarded as something bad? Why virginity has traditionally been

important at the beginning of marriage? Why even the killing of wives was condoned, if a wife committed adultery?

For some people the whole business of sexual property is no longer so important. One of the basic changes in sexual property is that it is no longer controlled in the same way it was. The divorce rate illustrates that in the dexual relationship, sexual property is no longer absolute or long term. This does not mean that marriage equals sex rather than love. Not at all. Indeed the non-obvious view, again, is that marriage today is more than ever a question of love.

One could argue that love was produced in arranged marriages by the nature of sexual property but such relationships are now negotiated by two independent individuals. Previously, where individuals had no power to negotiate who their partner would be, the negotiations did not always lead to an intimate bond between the couple. Now, given an open marriage market and freedom of choice, individuals negotiate, they get closer, are uncertain, not quite sure whether 'She loves me, she loves me not'. As they get closer, more intimate, people expose more and more of themselves. The bonding becomes tighter, the whole relationship becomes more emotionally charged, a sort of group solidarity between the couple is developed which makes that bond extremely important.

That's what modern love is and that's why modern marriage is so difficult. It is no longer just a matter of arranged marriages for the purpose of passing on property down through generations or for handling the exclusive rights to sexual property in the traditional way, where incest taboos have always existed to guarantee outsiders access to the sexual property produced inside the family itself. That very uncertainty, that very individual negotiating process, the courtship ritual, the privatised meanings that develop, mean in turn, greater love and greater commitment in modern marriage than ever. The privately negotiated relationship gives meaning to both life and to the self. It affirms that self so long as the partner continues to affirm you as an important person. It creates a small solidarity group, heavily invested with meaning, and because of that, gives a sense of meaning and therefore a sense of control in life.

I would argue that everything we have talked about in this conference has been about control. It has been about the negotiation of relationships for control, control both inside and outside marriage, control between external family members and internal family members, control vis-a-vis society and the family itself. People cannot behave in society without a sense of control. If they have no control, they either resent their exploitation, or they are unaware of it and suffer all sorts of consequences because of that.

Waller (1930) said that as far as he was concerned the most important research in the family area was not research which explained why couples break-up, or divorce, but rather research which explained why couples stay together. If you can answer that, he said, you can answer all of the rest.

We are moving towards a theory of why people stay together which may also explain why divorce is so traumatic. As I've suggested, the tenuous nature of individual choice of a marriage partner by negotiation within the marriage market, results in marriage meaning more to couples than it ever has before. Thus the trauma of divorce. It shatters the bonding, it shatters the sense of self, it shatters the capacity to control, it puts you out of control from a situation in which you were previously in control. Life's meaning is gone.

Let me add to Thomas' (1920) notion of 'crisis' precipitated by an inability to cope with life in the customary ways. In society as a whole a crisis may be precipitated because all the sense of meaning that was provided by the means of propaganda, the dominant symbols of the society have gone; such as happened in pre-war Germany, where Hitler gave a new sense of meaning to a chaotic society, or what happened after Hitler's defeat. On a smaller scale, divorce is a 'crisis', because it changes your customary ways of thinking, it challenges your taken-for-granted view. It leads to a loss of control; therefore, one searches for a new way of control, one looks for new meaning in order to restore control.

Some might argue that in contract marriage the obligations and benefits are more clearly spelled out. Marriage, as we know it now, is an implicit, rather than explicit contract. We are confused when it ends. Contract marriage may help to alleviate the trauma and make it possible for people to divorce without quite that sense of confusion or loss of meaning. In a way contract marriage would be a return to the certainties of arranged marriage, but the intimate negotiation of partnerships would remain; thuse separation would still challenge the bonds of mutually agreed meaning and precipitate a 'crisis' response.

Further, children as property are changing in their relationship to marriage. Parents traditionally had rights to children as property (generational property). Parents were able to control their behaviour, had the right to arrange their marriage, and had economic rights over them as property. They were property too, as producers. Children were sexual property to be disposed of to outsiders, but not for use inside the family. Another non-obvious point in this regard is in relation to incest prohibitions. The reality is that society has imposed taboos to prevent incest so that children became property in the wider marriage market.

One of the trends, I think, has been to reduce parental power over children. I can't go into all the details here, but obviously parental power has been reduced precisely because of the loss of the right to say who your children will marry. The loss of the power to determine inheritance, kinship links and transfer of property has reduced the power of parents to control generational property. This reduction of power has gone hand in hand with the assertion of independence, indeed the encouragement of independence by society. One needs to look at the reasons why that sense of independence has been encouraged by modern society (and it's not just in capitalist society either).

A number of papers at this conference have illustrated not just that marriage has a 'his' and 'her' side, a 'his marriage' and 'her marriage', but also theirs, the children's marriage, the children's view of marriage, often very different from what either of the parents believe.

As adult love has become more central in modern marriage, so too has love of children replaced the notion of children as property. It has been seen coming through, loudly and clearly, in the custody battles and those over access. It is seen too in the investment in children, both material and emotional, and in fewer offspring, a key demographic change.

The inheritance claim used to be important because of the transfer of family farm and business; that was what held families together. Now it is the emotional bond that holds families together and again I challenge the obvious. We have often been told that family bonds were more close-knit in the past, in the traditional family. I don't believe this is true. Today, with even more stress on emotional ties, the family is more emotionally bonded, more strongly bonded than ever before. And I suggest to you that the more society moves away from the transference of property rights, through inheritance, the more there will be resistance, because parental power will be challenged, one of the few elements of parental power left, and this may further reduce family stability. I am not saying that it is a bad thing to do, I am simply suggesting a non-obvious consequence that may flow from such action.

It is important to remember too that the family is an economic unit. I was very pleased to see a number of papers in the conference stressing economic aspects of the family, stratification between families and inequalities in resources. I'm gratified that this conference has probably brought us to the point of being able to say that there is no such ting as 'family policy'. We should no longer talk about family policy, but should talk about policies that impinge upon families, policies that have certain effects upon families, functions of Governments and administrators that have effects on families. The family is still an ongoing business engaged in running a household; it is a co-operative enterprise, more or less. However, as we know, and as many papers have shown us, that co-operative enterprise is very much sexually dominated, male dominated, and is I suggest another area that needs to be monitored more closely. We forget that property is not just things, property is also labour, and female labour has always been absolutely essential. Unfortunately much

of the labour in households has to be done by the woman, even when she works outside the household. The household economy is one of sex based domination, and no matter how much we would like to talk about equal property rights in divorce or wherever, we cannot talk about equal property rights if we ignore the woman's labour contribution. The woman repoduces the labour force by rearing children and maintains the status quo by getting the man ready to go to work every day.

If we achieve full sexual equality, and we're moving rapidly in that direction, it will clearly transform the whole nature of the household and of the family. We expect that, and we must plan for it. As society gets closer to sexual equality, it will mean, must mean, the transformation of the way in which households, the household economy, the whole basis of the family, exist.

So to sum up, two themes in particular partly emerged, but didn't emerge quite strongly enough. First, is the theme of sexual inequality and the answer to the question. 'Who wins, who loses?'. I think the bargaining process that revolves around marriage as an exchange of property rights of those three kinds I've mentioned is changing quite markedly. The other theme is the importance of relative incomes. It's still the importance of relative economic bases of support. Old-fashioned marriage, so called 'traditional' marriage, was more mercenary than modern love is. So don't think that I am talking about marriage just as an economic exchange. I think in fact it was much more mercenary in the old days than it is now. Individuals were simply pawns in the family marriage game. Nowadays, because generational property has declined, sexual property and household property remain the basic resources for negotiating a marriage deal. And those are the sorts of variables we aw researchers should look at. The way in which couples negotiate a marriage arrangement depends upon their relative property resources. These resources have been, and are still, unequally distributed and in the main, held by men. But the balance is gradually changing.

In the past marriage became a sort of trade-off of the sexual for household property. Again the non-obvious view would suggest that women won their first victory in the Victorian age by asserting publicly

(and winning public acceptance) that marriage was the exclusive domain for sex and that husbands were the exclusive sexual property of wives and vice-versa. That was a victory for women because it guaranteed them economic support. The rub, of course, was that it trapped them in patriarchal marriage. They are now getting out of that trap. Women now have further resources, they now have more to bargain with and I think we must expect that bargaining to challenge the whole balance of power in society. Several papers have referred to the fact that men are more dependent on marriage than women. Some evidence for this has come through the Institute's study of divorce through the Institute's Family Formation Study, through several of the small scale qualitative studies, and through some of the Family Court papers. That very dependency I think reflects the sense of uncertainty, the challenge that exists for modern men and we need to look for ways in which we can educate, adjust and explain that whole process.

We've had some excellent papers at the conference on the need for marriage support and marriage preparation. Many of those you will have heard; because they clashed, some of you won't have been able to hear them. I suggest that you go home and read them very carefully, because the whole approach to marriage support and marriage preparation needs re-thinking. We can no longer talk just about marriage counselling. For some people counselling comes too late. To talk only about family therapy versus something else, or pre-marriage education is no longer appropriate. We should be thinking about how to re-educate the whole society about the changes that are taking place, so that some of the trauma can be avoided. I don't see any reason why we need to tolerate the sort of trauma, the lack of understanding, the lack of communication, the agony that people have to go through. We don't have to expect that as a natural consequence of change; there are other ways of coping.

These are the themes as I see them and they are not necessarily the views of the Institute. I have spoken provocatively specifically because I felt that theory needs to be thrown around a little bit more. In sending you away with all that empirical data, I thought these comments might help you to question whether, what I've just thrown around as a few theoretical suggestions of what is going on is nonsense, or is worth thinking through. Thank you all very much for coming.

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- to promote, by the conduct, encouragement and co-ordination of research and other appropriate means, the identification of, and development of understanding of, the factors affecting marital and family stability in Australia, with the object of promoting the protection of the family as the natural and fundamental group unit in society; and

- to advise and assist the Attorney-General in relation to the making of grants, out of moneys available under appropriations made by the Parliament, for purposes related to the functions of the Institute and the supervising of the employment of grants so made.

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